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ABSTRACT

A study examined how pragmatic form influences evaluation of student essays in university placement testing. Specifically, the study documented how patterns in students' use of information (assumed to be either old, inferable, or new for readers) affected the holistic scores for quality given to the essays. Subjects, 99 randomly selected entering undergraduates, all native English speakers, wrote essays that responded to the same rhetorical demands--a transactional piece of prose explaining the writer's position on a current public issue. Each essay was ranked by two readers using a modified holistic scoring system. The use of categories from E. Prince's taxonomy allowed a cross-classification of 24 categories into which a piece of information could be placed. Results indicated that three kinds of social identities were salient in the placement-test situation: (1) that of the "test-taker," whose use of linguistic forms overtly appealed to the norms supposedly operating in the situation; (2) that of the "knowledgeable student," whose use of linguistic forms established credibility and appeal to literate traditions presumed shared with readers of the test; and (3) that of the "straightforwardly cooperative writer," whose use of linguistic forms established his or her personal sincerity and directness. If it is true that readers use linguistic forms simultaneously to construct message and writer, and that their evaluation of the former is better understood as a response to the latter, further research should pursue relations among other aspects of linguistic forms, social identity, and readers' evaluations. (Tables of data, sample essay topics marked according to Prince's taxonomy, and references are appended.) (NKA)

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Placing Texts, Placing Writers: Sources of Readers' Judgments in University Placement-testing

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Placing Texts, Placing Writers:
Sources of Readers' Judgments
in University Placement-testing[1]

This study examines how pragmatic form influences, in university placement-testing, evaluation of students' essays. Specifically, it documents how patterns in students' use of information assumed to be either old, inferable, or new for readers (Prince, 1981) affect the holistic scores for overall quality given to the essays and suggests that these effects are at least partly a function of the fact that this was a test--a demand that writers display, not only their writing, but also themselves.

The study itself grows out of my revision of placement-testing procedures at one university in 1981/1982. Asked by the Dean of Arts and Sciences to devise procedures that would make the assessment more reliable and accurate than it had been, I drew upon the best of the literature in the theory and method of assessing writing ability (Odell, 1981; Cooper & Odell, 1977; Myers, 1980). From this work I developed writing tasks intended to specify similar purposes, modes, and audiences; rubrics intended to specify those qualities expected of essays at each level of accomplishment; and anchor essays intended to illustrate each of the levels. But, during that first summer using our new procedures, situations arose time and again that I had not been prepared for by any of the literature I had studied so closely.

There were simply so many essays. During that summer, we tested over 3400 entering lower-division students alone, reading

each essay at least twice, and, in about 20% of the cases, giving it a third reading. It is difficult to communicate the experience of classifying so many texts, written on a small number of topics, most making very similar arguments. What became apparent very quickly was that neither the rubric I had developed nor the anchor papers I had collected from our program files adequately defined the categories as they had been intended to do. Although the readers and I spent frustrating time that summer revising the rubric, adding new anchor papers, and going over problem essays, we soon realized that there would always be a new problem to deal with, that no category was ever defined for good.

This is not to say that readers were not consistent with each other. According to the records I kept that summer, they were. But in making their judgments, it was not possible for them simply to calibrate themselves against the rubric and the anchor papers. Because there were so many essays, they were forced to deal constantly with texts that departed in new ways from the norms we had established. The readers were as much enacting the standards through their reading as they were adhering to any set of previously defined norms.

As a result, discussions of problem essays, of discrepancies in scores between readers, became centered not so much on differences in the weight given to particular criteria as on the interpretation of criteria. At times, two readers even interpreted the same text in contradictory ways on the same criterion, one calling it coherent and logical, the other unintelligible. Even when readers did not disagree on their

judgments, the problem remained; in fact, in some ways the problem became even more vexing. One reason that such a large number of essays were third-read was that we also used a multiple-choice test of mechanics and usage as a check on the readers. Essays whose scores departed significantly from what would have been predicted on the multiple-choice test were reviewed, usually by me, as the readers' supervisor. Here, again, it often seemed hard to fathom how, not just one, but two readers, experienced teachers in our program, could interpret criteria in the ways that they seemed to do. Nor was it simply a case of giving large numbers of essays low scores; readers placed, if not an equal number, a significant number of essays into categories far beyond what their surface features seemed to merit.

What I began to realize was that our discussions were largely concerned with discourse issues. What counts as a logical argument? When are two statements coherent? How much elaboration is sufficient? What does it take for a position to be deemed reasonable, a criticism insightful? The ways that readers answered these questions seemed to influence, not only how they interpreted and evaluated the substance of an essay's argument, but how they interpreted and evaluated other, formal features of the texts. What made one essay simple and direct and another simplistic could not be determined from any count of stylistic features alone. Even the "same" mistakes in mechanics or usage might be taken as evidence of quite different sorts, depending, it seemed, on how these other questions were answered.

Moreover, readers tended to refocus these issues away from questions about features of the texts to questions about the writer: "Is this an ELECT (the acronym for the basic writing program) student?" was the question that surfaced time and again. Clearly, readers were bringing to bear their own experiences with the program and with the behavior of ELECT students, and their beliefs about the purpose of the encounter to interpret features of the text as evidence of the writer's identity. Indeed, it was not unusual for discussions of a text's coherence to turn on questions concerning the writer's character: e.g., her naïveté, seriousness, sincerity.

It was these facts I hoped that the present study would explain. I needed to account, I felt, for a situation in which readers were forced to classify an overwhelming number of texts in very short periods of time, one in which those evaluations seemed inextricably tied to interpretation of discourse features as evidence of the writer's identity, and one in which those interpretations seemed to depend very much on readers' beliefs and assumptions--about the world, about the writers, but especially about the purpose of what they were doing. Since that time, I have read a great deal more on evaluation, reading which suggests that the experience I have recounted is not unique to a single institution but typical of testing situations in colleges and universities generally.

Related Literature

Over the last twenty-five years, research into the evaluation of writing has been conducted along two, parallel lines of

development. Along the first, researchers (Diederich et al., 1961; Cooper, 1977; Lloyd-Jones, 1977) have developed increasingly precise scoring procedures for ranking whole texts along a continuum. Along the second, researchers (Hunt,1964, 1977; Christensen, 1963a, 1963b; Halliday and Hasan, 1977) have developed similarly precise systems for identifying those syntactic and semantic structures used in the construction of mature, coherent texts.

Both lines of research have contributed much to our understanding of how texts are constructed and judged. Researchers can rank whole texts consistently, using criteria that characterize abstract qualities which define levels of achievement in terms of specific purposes and audiences the content of writers' messages are intended to address. They can identify, in writing considered excellent and poor, differences in the presence of structures deemed essential to the communication of the writer's message. Yet, research studies bringing the two lines together have found time and again that use of any kind of syntactic or semantic structure explains very little of the variance in readers' ranking of the overall quality of the text (Faigley, 1979; Gebhard, 1978; Nold and Freedman, 1977; Witte and Faigley, 1981).

Faigley (1979) compared increases in essay "maturity" on six syntactic structures measureable on indices constructed by Hunt and Christensen with increases in writers' overall ability, as measured by changes in holistic ratings of overall quality given to essays written by first-year undergraduates at the beginning

and end of a writing course. He found that changes in the use of all six syntactic structures added together accounted for only 22% of the variance in holistic scores; Hunt's indices alone predicted less than 1% of the variance. This finding is similar to that of Nold and Freedman (1977) and Gebhard (1978). Indeed, Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg (Morenberg, 1979, cited in Faigley, 1980) found that these indices explained only 4% of the variance in readers' scores.

Research proceeding from Halliday and Hasan's (1977) work on cohesion has also had quite limited results. Time and again, researchers have failed to show that the use of cohesive ties explains any significant portion of the variation in readers' overall rankings of the texts. Tierney and Mosenthal(1983), comparing the use of cohesive ties to readers' ranking for "clarity of expression and general coherence" of texts written by twelfth-grade students found "no causal relationship between proportional measures of coherence and coherence rankings" (p. 215). Applebee, Durst, and Newell (1984), using Hasan's (1980) codification of interactions among lexical chains, found no significant relationship between any type of interaction and readers' evaluation of overall quality for texts written by secondary school students in science and social science.

By contrast, in a comparative study of the use of lexical ties in essays ranked highest and lowest written by first-year undergraduates, Witte and Faigley (1981) did find the use of "collocations"--associative ties between two words based only on antecedant knowledge--to distinguish the two groups. "Lexical

collocation appears 94 times per 100 T-units in the high-rated essays in contrast to 28.8 times per 100 T-units in the low-rated essays. They conclude that "writing quality is in part defined as the 'fit' of a particular text to its context," a fit which "allows a text to be understood in a real-world setting" (p. 139). Other work suggests that the situational context of assessment creates a highly specific real-world setting.

The work of Williams (1979) and Hake and Williams (1981) proceeds from the premise that research into maturity or effectiveness must take into account those structures that influence readers' experience of the text's message. They identify one such influence as the use of "nominals," defined as "a noun that has an underlying expressible English verb" (p. 435). Habitual use of such structures defines a nominal style, in contrast to the verbal, which expresses "in [its] subject-verb-object grammatical strings a corresponding agent-action-goal structure" (p. 435).

Hake and Williams' methodology is quite significant. Rhetorical definitions of writing ability which identify effectiveness with efficiency in communicating a text's referential message (Christensen, 1968; Hirsch, 1977) make clear predictions about how readers ought to evaluate overall text quality. All things being equal, readers ought to prefer efficient, direct texts to inefficient, indirect versions, a preference that should be reflected in significantly higher scores for the former. Hake and Williams' equation of efficiency with correspondence between a text's surface syntactic structure and

its underlying semantic structure--the verbal style--thus offers a criterion by which one can, within that theory, distinguish effective from ineffective texts independent of readers' judgments. Research based on this method, therefore, tests the limits of the very theory on which it rests.

On four occasions, Williams and Hake gave to teachers from different schools and levels of education texts rewritten so as to be virtually identical in every respect save for differences in style. The ostensible purpose of each occasion was either assessment of student competence or program assessment. Unstratified rankings showed no difference between scores for the nominal and verbal versions, however. Indeed, on one occasion when teachers were allowed to note and classify errors they found in the texts, college teachers actually preferred the nominal to the verbal versions, even though they reported more errors--especially in meaning, logic, and style--in them. Swain (1981) reported nearly identical results, using rewritten essays read by "eight public examiners in English from the Western Australian Examination marking panel and one hundred and three final-year [student] teachers" (p. 11). In these five instances, hemispheres apart, the effects of style on teachers' evaluations were nearly the opposite of what the theory itself would have predicted.

Other work complements these studies. Focusing directly on readers' responses in the context of testing, Barritt, Stock, and Clark (1986) recorded, during a two-year period, comments made by some 19 readers of university placement-test essays on approximately 100 different texts. The researchers classified

these comments into three categories: those focusing on the text; those focusing on what they termed "the imagined student writer" (p. 319); and those focusing on "the prospective student" (p. 320). Comments assigned to the first category, the researchers found, were given to essays interpreted as resembling "those of the majority of the eighteen year-old college freshmen we had come to know" (p. 321). Comments in the latter two categories were given to essays that departed significantly from those norms. In such cases, comments focused on the writer's character as student, e.g., "an exceptional student," ""real clever student," vs. "needs to be socialized," "a 'tutorial' student," and "smart alec" (pp. 319-322). However, the researchers note that two readers would often interpret the writer's character quite differently from the same essay. In bringing to bear their own experience of students and courses appropriate for them, features of the text that on the surface seemed the "same" were interpreted as giving very different evidence about writers' character as students.

Similar results were reported by Siegel (1980), comparing the ways experienced teachers of writing from a university English Department graded compositions written by first-year undergraduates to the ways that faculty from other departments new to teaching writing did so. English teachers quite regularly characterized student writers as, "childish, dull, useless, empty, pedestrian, high-schoolish, and (most often), naïve" (p. 17). Responses to the writers' character appear to be an essential part of teachers' evaluations of students' writing and may even distinguish English faculty from those in other departments.

Freedman (1984) confirms and extends these findings, locating their source in specific roles students are expected to adopt in this situation. Inserting essays written by published professionals into a larger set written by entering first-year undergraduates, she found, surprisingly little difference: "the average score given a professional was 2.65; the average score given a student was 2.24" (p. 336). Indeed, the three highest scores went to students. In further ratings on scales for voice, sentence structure, word-choice, usage, development, and organization, professionals received outstanding scores in the first four categories but highly inconsistent scores for development and organization. From her analysis of the essays' content, she concludes that

> the professionals violated their expected student roles: they were threateningly familiar, some defied the task, they wrote too definitely about novel ideas, and they displayed a literally unbelievable amount of knowledge. . . . If a reader does not perceive the writer to have authority, and if the writer takes authority, much of the writer's language can be misinterpreted and misevaluated" (pp. 344-345).

One of the expectations that teachers as evaluators of students' prose bring to the situation is that writers must show deference in displaying their ability. Major departures from these norms are as likely to be penalized as rewarded, with the judgment being attributed to readers' evaluation of the development and organization of the text's message.

The research reviewed here argues strongly that evaluation of writing ability is best viewed as a multifunctional social interaction. Although readers do not respond directly to differences in linguistic structures and forms as such, it is not the case that they are irrelevant to readers' evaluations of quality. Readers connect linguistic forms to their knowledge, values, and beliefs in order to interpret the message--the referential content--of students' texts. At the same time, however, readers, such as those in the studies reported by Barritt, Stock, and Clark and by Siegel, connect those linguistic forms to their own expectations about the purpose of the encounter to identify the kind of writer who would send such a message: readers construct writers as well as texts. So, it would seem that construction of message content from its form goes hand in hand with construction, from the same form, of an identity for the writer in the situation.

To say this is not to say that both are equally important to readers' evaluations, however. Though readers may overtly attribute their evaluations to features connected to communication of a text's message, as did readers in Freedman's study, close analysis of those features may show their form to be at odds with readers' judgments. This contradiction was strikingly clear in the Hake and Williams study, in which readers not only responded positively to texts the form of which should have resulted in negative evaluations, but did so despite the number of "flaws" in logic and organization observed in them. Use of discourse forms that are impediments to the communication of a text's message may

even influence readers to interpret "flaws" positively, as evidence of writers' overall ability.

The problem these findings pose for methodolgy is to interpret results of any analysis in terms that acknowledge the multifunctionality of linguistic forms in utterances. Such a view is consistent with the work of Hymes, (1962/1968), who develops a notion of interaction between language functions and social life in which linguistic features "may participate in all the functions" (p. 117). Although language functions are realized in features of language, their meaning "cannot be determined fromn linguistic factors alone"(p. 112). Rather, which functions become salient (and thus how linguistic features are interpreted) depend upon participant beliefs about the purpose of the encounter. In the encounter called placement-testing, two purposes seem to be overriding, at least from the perspective of reading. Readers must both rank texts in terms of how well they communicate their messages and identify writers in terms of who is competent, who can become an apprentice member of the academic community.

To the extent this is true, shared rhetorical or syntactic styles are insufficient as a way to make that identification. As Hymes (1972) puts it, "There may be persons whose English I can grammatically identify but whose messages escape me. I may be ignorant of what <u>counts</u> [emphasis added] as a coherent sequence, request, statement requiring an answer, requisite or forbidden topic, [or a] marking of emphasis or irony" (p. 54). Since these texts are read as a way of "placement," of identifying those writers who behave appropriately as students, then the texts

themselves become the site upon which that identity is established. But, in the case of conflict over interpretations, it must be remembered that, in this situation, it is the readers' judgments that have power, their decisions that define "what counts." In that sense, then, this study documents the power of readers to characterize students as "cooperative" writers.

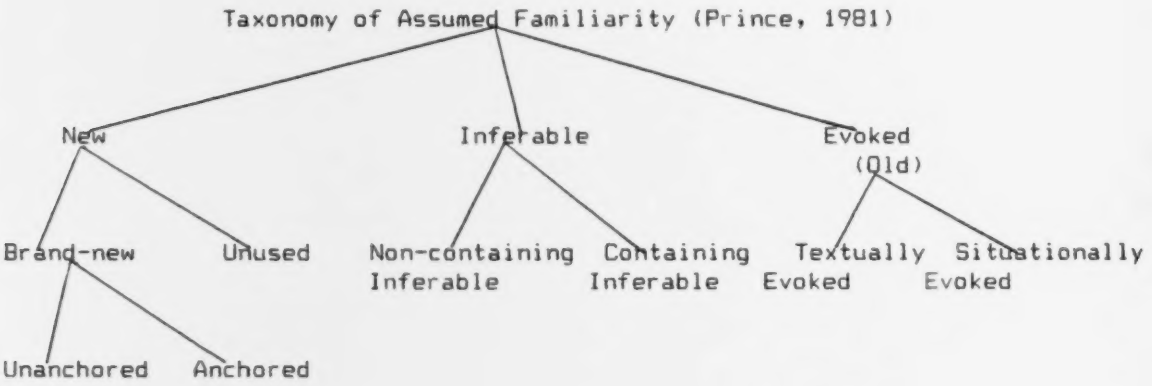
Method

The study used essays written by 99 randomly selected lower-division students entering the university during the summer of 1982. Non-native students were deliberately excluded from the sample, though I could not determine definitely that no student had been brought up in a bi-lingual household. All students had written essays that responded to the same rhetorical demands--a transactional piece of prose explaining the writer's position on a current public issue. The essays had been ranked using a modified holistic scoring system based on that suggested by Diederich (1974) and Cooper (1977). Each essay had been scored by two readers on a one (low) to six (high) scale, using written criteria and model essays intended to characterize each level of performance. The readers' scores had then been added together, giving the essay a total score that could range from a low of two to a high of twelve. Discrepancies of more than one point in the scores had been adjudicated by me as testing co-ordinator.

Essays receiving total scores between two and six were considered "Incompetent;" those with scores between eight and twelve were considered "Competent." Students whose essays had been judged "Incompetent" were placed into one of two levels of

full-tuition non-credit writing courses. Students whose essays had been judged "Competent" were placed into the four-credit first-year composition course. Placement for students with essay scores of seven turned on the students' score on a multiple-choice test of usage and mechanics. All these essays had been third-read by me, however. When I thought it appropriate, I had changed the score up or down to change the placement.[2]

Analysis of the texts was based on a taxonomy of given/new information developed by Prince (1981), which classifies information represented in noun phrases according to how familiar readers are assumed to be with it. Prince offers three categories of what she terms "Assumed Familiarity," each of which is further subdivided. Overall, information is assumed to be either New, Inferable, or old (which she terms "Evoked") for readers. The taxonomy is diagrammed below.



Though this taxonomy is intended to apply equally to participants in speech and writing, for the purposes of this discussion, I shall refer to writers and readers only. All information introduced into a discourse is assumed to be New.

Brand-new information represents things assumed new both to the discourse and to readers. The writer hasn't mentioned the information before and doesn't assume readers can identify it either. This kind of information is cast in indefinite noun phrases. Brand-new, anchored information differs from unanchored in that the former is linked to some other piece of information via a complex noun phrase. Contrast (1) and (2):

(1) A man went to Penn. (Brand-new, unanchored)

(2) A man I know went to Penn. (Brand-new, anchored)

In (2) the entity represented as a man is "upgraded" by its being linked to an entity, I, assumed more familiar to readers. In (1) no such link is made.

Unused information, by contrast, represents things new to the discourse but assumed known to readers. The information need not be salient in readers' consciousnesses, but the writer has reason to believe the information is available in readers' memories. Proper names make up the bulk of such entities--but not all. For instance, in (3)

(3) In the real world, discourse is judged by what it accomplishes.

the referent of the underlined phrase is assumed known to the reader, even though it has not appeared previously in the discourse.

Old information, which Prince terms "Evoked," is assumed known to the reader because it appears elsewhere in the discourse. Textually Evoked information has already been referred to in the text. Situationally Evoked information represents salient features

of the immediate situation, including participants and the text itself. Personal and deictic pronouns and repetitions of the same noun phrase make up the bulk of this category.

Information that is neither old--it hasn't appeared in the discourse--nor new--its identity is neither completely unknown to readers nor available to them in memory--is considered Inferable. The writer assumes that readers can identify such information by using logical, though more often plausible, reasoning to connect it to some other piece of information that appears elsewhere in the text. Inferable information is always represented by definite noun phrases (including noun clauses), though they may not be marked as such by the definite article. Containing Inferables differ from Non-containing Inferables in that, in the former, the two entities to be connected occur within a single noun phrase. In the latter, they do not. Rather, writers assume that readers will make the appropriate connection without it being marked syntactically. In both (4) and (5), for instance,

(4) I came in yesterday, and the students in my classroom were all milling about. The whole place was a mess.

(5) I came in yesterday, and my classroom was a mess. The students were all milling about. . .

readers are expected to use plausible reasoning to identify "the students," by connecting that entity to "my classroom," on the assumption that classrooms are the kinds of places that have students. The form of (4), however, identifies explicitly the information to be connected.

Because writers must usually take into account a group of readers whose knowledge and beliefs will differ from member to member, there is a good deal of "blurring between what is Unused and what is Inferable" (Prince, 1981, p. 251). On the one hand, writers need to give those readers with insufficient knowledge enough information for them to identify as definitely as possible the entity being referred to; on the other hand, they don't want to give unnecessarily redundant information to more knowledgeable readers. Use of this strategy allows the writer to be co-operative with both kinds of readers.

Prince offers (6) as an example:

(6) "In their methodological reflections. . . ,<u>scholars such as Kenneth Burke and Ernst Cassirer</u> have found the question of function. . . indispensible" (1981, pp. 247-248).

The form of the underlined noun phrase allows less knowledgeable readers to infer at least the sort of scholars who belong to the class being identified. Because this strategy seemed so significant, I added it as a separate category in my study. Information, usually cast in the form of a complex noun phrase, that might be considered Unused for some readers but Inferable for others was classified as Unused-or-Inferable information.

<u>Results</u>

In each of the 99 essays, I classified all information represented by noun phrases according to one of the eight categories of Assumed Familiarity: Brand-new, unanchored (BN); Brand-new, anchored (BNA); Unused (U); Unused-or-Inferable (UOI); Noncontaining Inferable (I); Containing Inferable (CI); Textually

Evoked (TE); Situationally Evoked (SE). I also classified them according to their position--pre-subject, subject, post-subject--in the clause in which they appeared. This cross-classification gives 24 categories into which a piece of information could be placed.

Of these 24 factors, five correlated significantly with essay score: Containing Inferables in subject position (.41; p.=.001); Unused-or-Inferable information in all three positions (pre-subject: .33; subject: .34; post-subject: .33; p= .001); and Situationally Evoked entities in subject position (-.23; p= .02). Combining positions to examine the total number of each entity type in each essay results in Brand-new, anchored entities correlating significantly, though slightly with essay score (.26; p= .005), and raises the correlation for Unused-or-Inferable entities (.42; p= .001).

Regression analysis shows that, taken together, use of Containing Inferable and Situationally Evoked information in subject position and use of Unused-or-Inferable information and Brand-new, anchored information in the three positions combined accounts for almost 36% of the variance in essay score (r^2= .355). The use of Unused-or-Inferable information accounts for almost half the total, some 18%; use of Containing Inferables in subject position explains another 12%; use of Situationally Evoked information and Brand-new, anchored information in subject position each account for 3%.

Hoetker (1982), in his review of research on assessment, found that

> rating scales are constructed in such a way that ratings will cluster around the 'average' score (which is also usually the lowest acceptable score). In over a dozen studies we have done, for example, using a four-point rating scale and three raters (with a range of scores, therefore, from 3 to 12), we have always found that the modal score is 6 and that the distribution is sharply peaked aroun a mean of 6.5 (p. 378).

This same phenomenon is true of placement-testing at the institution under study here. Of the 3403 lower-division students who tested between May 1 and August 30, 1982, the period covered by this study, 62.5% of them received scores of 6, 7, or 8. To see what effect use of these four entity-types had on readers' judgments at these critical points, I ran regression analysis using the same variables on only those essays which had received one of those three scores.

Since there is now so much less variance to account for, correlations are, of course, lower: the four variables now explain 19.8% of the variance in essay scores. More important, the order of the hierarchy is quite different from what it had been with the analysis of the entire sample. Unused-or-Inferable information still explains the largest percentage of the variance, 12.7%, but almost all the rest, 5.6%, is explained by the use of Situationally Evoked entities in subject position. Use of Containing Inferables in subject position explains only an additional 1.4%, while use of Brand-new, anchored entities explains .1%.

These categories are those that students rely on the least in communicating their message. The 348 Containing Inferables in subject position represent only 5.6% of the 6207 entities in the sample; the 370 Unused-or-Inferable entities, 5.9%; the 417 Brand-new, anchored entities, 6.6%; and the 109 Situationally Evoked entities in subject position 1.8%. Moreover, the range for each of these entity types is small, and the means and standard deviations are both low. Table One (p. 37) gives the distribution of each of these entity types in the sample.

INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

For Containing Inferable subjects, 68% of the essays have between 1 and 6. Though the use of Unused-or-Inferables information has a range of 16, 68% of the essays contain between 0 and 7. Though the use of Brand-new, anchored information ranges even more widely, 68% of the essays contain between 1 and 7. Sixty-eight percent of the essays contain between 0 and 2 Situationally Evoked subjects. In other words, reliance on these forms represents substantial deviation from the norm; relatively few students relied on these types of entities to elaborate their message; readers responded substantively to those who did.

Discussion

Prince's Taxonomy of Assumed Familiarity makes definite predictions about the kinds of judgments readers ought to make, to the extent that those judgments are based on the appropriateness of text form to the efficient communication of its referential

content. The taxonomy is linked to Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, specifically the Maxim of Quantity, which states:

> 1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
>
> 2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (p. 45)

In her analyses of both oral and written texts, Prince found "a preferred hierarchy or scale for what type of entity is used" (p. 245). To be co-operative, writers will choose an entity type as high in the hierarchy as they can, as follows:

(1) Old (either Textually or Situationally Evoked)

(2) Unused

(3) Unused-or-Inferable

(4) Noncontaining Inferable

(5) Containing Inferable

(6) Brand-new, anchored

(7) Brand New, unanchored.

This hierarchy does not predict how often an entity type is likely to appear in a text. Unused entities are higher on the scale than either of the inferable entity types, for instance, though the latter occur far more often. Nor is it a hierarchy of explicitness of form. Noncontaining Inferables are higher on the scale than are Containing Inferables, though the latter are much more explicit. Rather, the hierarchy reflects the fact that full cooperation in the maximally efficient exchange of information requires writers to assume as much familiarity on readers' part as is reasonable at that point in the discourse. It is this fact

that explains why Noncontaining Inferables are preferred to Containing Inferables. If it is reasonable to assume that readers can make a particular inferential connection at a certain point in the discourse, writers would be "more informative than required" if they explicitly marked the connection by employing a Containing Inferable.

Following Gricean notions, writers may use an entity lower or higher on the scale than their assumptions about the state of readers' knowledge would dictate. If they do so, then the burden falls on readers to figure out the reason why the writer has not been straightforwardly cooperative. Such a failure may be interpreted by readers either as "violating" the maxim, i.e., being "liable to mislead;" as "opting out," i.e., being unable to continue the exchange; as resulting from a "clash" between this maxim and another such that one cannot fulfill both; or as "exploiting" the maxim, using the failure intentionally to produce a specific effect, such as irony (Grice, p. 49).

The hierarchy developed by Prince and the Gricean framework in which it is embedded offer a criterion for predicting how readers should evaluate the informational structure of texts. Under normal circumstances, writers who structure the information in their texts in a manner deemed cooperative by readers will be rewarded for doing so. Moreover, it predicts, to some extent, how readers should evaluate deviations from that norm. Those deemed violations will be evaluated negatively; those deemed exploitations will be evaluated positively; those interpreted as clashes may be evaluated positively, though evaluation here will

also depend upon readers' decisons about whether the writer made the right choice in failing to fulfill one Maxim so as not to violate another.

Use of three entity types--Brand-new, anchored, Unused-or-Inferable, and Situationally Evoked in subject position--deviate sharply from what would be predicted given the above criteria. Moreover, the ways in which they deviate establish particular identities for writers in this situation. With Brand-new, anchored entities, for instance, one would presume, on the basis of Prince's hierarchy, that writers were being rewarded for making clear and accurate distinctions between information completely unfamiliar to readers and information more familiar to them, while linking that information to topics previously introduced. But, in these texts, that is often not the case. Even the kind of information formulated as Brand-new differs in important ways from what Prince found in her own analyses. In the oral narratives that she analyzed, Brand-new, anchored entities generally represented specific indefinites, references to some one individual or thing assumed unfamiliar to the reader, as in (7)

(7) John wants to marry a Norwegian, and there she is in the corner.

where the form of the first underlined noun phrase presupposes at least that the writer does not presume readers to be able to identify the entity, while the form of the second underlined noun phrase presupposes that the writer is specifying a particular member of the class named.

Those in the students' writing much more often represent non-specific indefinites, if not generics. For instance, in Essay One in the Appendix (p. 38), of the 11 entities labeled Brand-new, anchored, at least 7, and possibly 9, represent non-specific indefinites. When this writer refers to "a group discussion," "a book report following questions written up by the school," or "a book from a school," she seems to be assuming that little of substance is shared with readers for an entire class of entities--an astonishing assumption given the topic of discussion in this student's essay.

Clearly, such writers are not being rewarded for fulfilling the Maxim of Quantity. In this case in particular, the writer had good reason to assume that readers, teachers of English, would be much more familiar with the information under discussion than the form of the information presupposes. Given that fact, one might presume that readers would evaluate such a deviation negatively, as a violation of the Maxim of Quantity. But, if the essay score of 8 is any evidence, they did not. Of course, the fact that the student had had to write impromptu on topics unknown to her until she took the test may have made it difficult for her to fulfill the Maxim of Quantity, without at the same time failing to fulfill the Maxim of Quality. Use of Brand-new, anchored information might then be a way for writers to resolve the clash.

Yet, the argument that readers were rewarding this resolution of a clash between the maxims of Quantity and Quality is not wholly satisfactory. Lakoff (1982), discussing ways in which discourse forms in advertising fail to fulfill the Cooperative

Principle, offers (8) as a typical example:

(8) Works better than a leading detergent.

In fact, use of the indefinite violates the Maxim of Quantity, since for the discourse to be truly informative, readers need to know more definitely the identity of the entity under discussion. But use of brand new information, in this instance, adopts "the surface trappings of informative (i.e. Co-operative Principle obeying) discourse and thereby leads us to conclude that it is informative. . . . the flouting of the maxim is covert, and we are tricked into assuming that an act of information is taking place in cases like this, where in fact it is not" (p. 37). Lakoff goes on to conclude that in the context of advertizing, the demands of the discourse type, in this instance persuasion, encourage use of strategies which undermine the very assumptions about the purpose of communication on which the discourse and the Cooperative Principle are based.

Lakoff's point is that writers, in this case advertizers, may manipulate linguistic features associated with the Cooperative Principle to serve functions that other than that presumed by that principle. In the context of placement testing, it would seem that readers can interpret linguistic features similarly.[3] In several ways, the two contexts overlap. In both, failure to fulfill the Maxim of Quantity is covert; in both that failure subverts the overt rhetorical purpose of the exchange: what appears to be reliance on the Cooperative Principle lessens the degree to which any particular content can be understood. The entities are contentless; in a sense, they are grounded in nothing at all. In

the case of placement-testing, the anchoring maintains only the appearance of keeping the discourse "coherent," of linking "new" information to "old." In fact, it functions as way of over-representing form in order to under-represent substance. The function of this feature for readers, then, lies not in the way it identifies the writing but in the way it identifies the writer.

The identity of writers represented by such a style is well-known in the world of school assignments. It is that of the writer who knows "How to Say Nothing in Five Hundred Words" (Roberts, 1958), who is not simply resolving a conflict in communicating information but knows that the "point" of this communication goes beyond conveying a message. In rewarding use of these entities, readers were not only evaluating writers' communicative abilities but also legitimizing that identity--the "test taker," one who is able to construct the form of communication even to the extent of sacrificing its substance.

Surprisingly, the use of Unused-or-Inferable entities also implicated, in many instances, that readers were less familiar with the information than they were likely to be. In some cases, this deviation appears to result from the fact that writers in this situation must respond to the demands of a unique readership, one composed of a hypothetical audience (given in the topic question) and a real audience, whose knowledge and beliefs are necessarily very different from one another. Writers must therefore construe their readers in highly sophisticated ways. The writer who must represent an entity that refers to the school board of his hometown faces a complex dilemma relative to these

two sets of readers. Should he refer to it by its official title, including the name of the town, in which case the entity would be Unused-or-Inferable? If he does he violates the Maxim of Quantity by assuming, for his hypothetical audience, less familiarity than he has reason to believe they possess. Few people live in a town without knowing of its school board. But, if he refers to it less fully, using an Unused entity type, he also violates the Maxim, presuming familiarity on the part of his actual readers that he has no business doing. Readers of essay exams do not know the towns in which the writers grew up.

But it is not the case that writers can simply opt to co-operate fully with the actual readers. The writer of Example Two in the Appendix (p. 39), who represented the governing body of his school district as "The school board of Emmaus High School" still did not provide his actual readers with enough information for them to identify the school board, since it was no more likely that they were any more familiar with the entity represented by "Emmaus High School" than they were with that represented by "the school board." If the purpose of an Unused-or-Inferable entity is to connect an entity less familiar to readers to one that is more familiar to them, the example above fails to achieve its purpose. That this is not obvious at first reading of the essay only illustrates the power of the norms unique to this situation. Imagine an actual newspaper editorial that referred to a school board in a town it could assume few readers had ever heard of, and referred to it in such a way that readers were left with no idea of just what town was being identified. Such an example is

implausible precisely because actual editorial writers do attempt to be co-operative. In their situation, they would have represented the entity more fully, maybe as "The school board of Emmaus High School, in Southeastern Pennsylvania." Yet, this writer could not opt for that choice without appearing even more un-cooperative to his hypothetical readers.

Nor is this an isolated instance. Neither the identification of the authors of Oedipus the King and of Othello nor the identification of Lord Acton as the author of the final quotation is necessary to identify the information. Readers who could not already identify Oedipus or the source of the quotation are not likely to be able to identify the named authors. Few readers, on the other hand, do not know who wrote Othello.

Further, whereas, for example, it would usually be preferable to say simply, "The Russian Revolution," the writer of Example Two wrote "The Russian Revolution of 1917." Now, it is true that there was an abortive revolution in 1905, so that one might argue that the date is necessary to distinguish the two. However, the earlier revolution is a fact relatively unknown outside history books; the readers of the essay were not likely to have known it--I did not at the time--and it is certainly not the sort of knowledge we generally ascribe to incoming first-year undergraduates. Unless we assume that not only was this writer aware of this fact but also his readers were, the second formulation gives readers no more help in identifying the entity than does the first. Yet, given the choice, the writer consistently preferred to cast entities in a form that assumed

otherwise, but which gave neither real nor hypothetical readers any additional information. And, he was rewarded for having done so.

This deviation could be said to represent a "clash" between the Maxims of Quantity and Quality, in which writers seem to have chosen to fulfill the latter, a choice which readers seem to value exceedingly. Cooper (1984, pp. 119-120), in discussing Grice's maxims, points out that the Maxim of Quality is both a sincerity condition--writers must establish that they believe what they are saying--and a credibility condition--they must establish that they have some grounds for saying it. For some, the mere fact of their status establishes grounds. Clerics can marry, mayors can proclaim, and teachers, one supposes, can lecture simply on the strength of their status in the situation. The status of these writers--students--gives them no such strength. If anything, the opposite is the case. These writers are not presumed to be the kind of people who can explain/defend a position. They are presumed incompetent until they prove otherwise. In contrast to use of Brand-new, anchored information, this over-representation of form also over-represents substance (factual, definite information), an over-representation which readers evaluate as ratifying writers' credibility.

Moreover, the kinds of substantive information writers choose to over-represent may influence readers' evaluations. In particular, use of entities that appeal to shared traditions, especially literate traditions, seems to be a very successful way for writers to establish a credible identity in this situation.

Had the writer of Essay Two, for instance, on a supposed proposal to ban certain books from the local high school library, wished to illustrate his point with examples of books typically the target of book-banners, he would likely have picked books by such popular authors of sexually explicit adolescent literature as Judy Blume. Instead, this writer refers to "Sophocles's 'Oedipus the King'" and "his (i.e., "Shakespeare") Othello." It is from these exemplars, and not from the likes of Judy Blume, that, further on in the essay, readers are to infer the meaning of "fine literature."

Similarly, at the end of the essay, the writer could have chosen many quotations, but the one he did choose only serves further to identify as shared that literate tradition from which the quote was taken. That is not a tradition likely to have been shared by many of the readers supposedly addressed by the topic, in this case citizens of a small town in rural Pennsylvania. Indeed, had they been the actual readers, they might have interpreted these assumptions quite differently. But this writer knew well that the audience invoked was not the audience to be addressed (Ede and Lunsford, 1984).

Such "deviant" uses of Unused-or-Inferable entities function, not simply to enable readers to identify information, nor to link new discourse topics to old, but also to identify writers as the kinds of students who "know their stuff," whether the "stuff" is rhetorical (e.g. that writers know how to make connections in texts) or intellectual (that writers know the particular shared values and literate traditions to appeal to). That this entity

type correlated most substantively with essay score, and did so regardless of the clause position in which it appeared, indicates that it is this identity that appeals most persuasively to readers. The correlation is also consistent with results of research reviewed earlier. Both in Barritt, Stock, and Clark's study and in Freedman's work, writers perceived as students needed to display their ability. In both, readers responded to those who displayed substantive knowledge of rhetorical strategies and literary information. That readers differed so greatly in their evaluations shows only that no strategy is risk-free in a situation in which the criteria overtly governing readers' evaluations are being constantly undermined by its covert purpose.

Although the use of Situationally Evoked information in subject position correlates much less substantively, and only at the center of the distribution, its negative evaluation is consistent with the analysis thus far and with results of work reviewed earlier. Though Situationally Evoked entities could refer to many elements of the situational context, including the text itself, the overwhelming majority of them referred to just two: the writer, generally identified as "I," and the readers, usually referred to as "you." Now, although the data show only 109 uses of Situationally Evoked subjects, that fact does not mean that these forms appeared only that number of times in the sample. An entity was coded Situationally Evoked only the first time it was mentioned in a text. All future mentions were coded Textually Evoked. The 109 instances therefore represent a much larger number of direct references to writers and readers than might first be

thought.

Still, not every first use of these forms, at least not of "you", was coded Situationally Evoked. Uses judged to represent what is generally known as the "impersonal 'you'" were coded as Brand-new, unanchored, in that they represented not references to the specific readers, either hypothetical or actual, of the essay, but references to a non-specific, possibly generic, referent, similar to that represented by "anyone".

Essay 3 in the Appendix (p. 40) is a typical example of the use of this entity-type. Particularly notable is the fact that every coded use of "I" is as the subject of verbs whose illocutionary force is to express the writer's belief in the truth of what follows.[4] The writer either "feels that" or "would like to say that" seven times in the essay, beginning three out of his four paragraphs with one or the other verb form. Indeed, every one of his points is introduced by a statement that overtly expresses his belief in the proposition--the reason--that follows, an expression of sincerity clearly in fulfillment of the Maxim of Quality.

The three coded uses of "you," though they might first seem instances of indefinite general reference, are, perhaps, better seen as direct references to the students previously referred to in the third person. Two of those three occur as subjects of clauses. In both clauses the writer asserts cause/effect relations between readers' having a particular desire ("If you want") or belief ("If you feel") and the result or action that should lead to it ("a knowledge of a computer at a young age will

help") or follow from it ("you should find another University or place of schooling").

Use of "I" and "you" in subject position seems to establish overtly the writer's personal sincerity and the nature of the writer's relationship to readers: intimate, informal, and equal. The writer, in responding to the task, is about as direct and co-operative as he can be. But it is just this kind of directness and informality Hake and Williams found readers to devalue: writers were penalized for making the agents of actions the subjects of clauses and rewarded for referring to them indirectly. "My preference" is valued over "I prefer," "my belief" over "I believe." And it is a similar directness and informality which Freedman finds provokes such mixed responses from teacher evaluators of students' writing. It seems to be this kind of social identity constructed in this situation which influences readers to evaluate this use, not as a fulfilling of the Maxim of Quality, but as an inexcusable violation of the Maxim of Quantity--giving more information than is required.

Conclusions and Implications

Three kinds of social identities were found to be salient in this situation: that of the "test-taker," whose use of linguistic forms overtly appealed to the norms of the Cooperative Principle supposed to be operating in the situation but in doing so undermined them; that of the "knowledgeable student," whose use of linguistic forms established credibility and appeal to literate traditions presumed shared with the readers of the test; and the "straightforwardly cooperative writer," whose use of linguistic

forms established his/her personal sincerity and directness. In the first two instances, use of these forms represented deviations, in the same direction, from the norms of the Co-operative Principle: both entity types implicated that readers needed more information than they did. These deviations were evaluated positively. Ironically, the third, use of Situationally Evoked subjects, seems to have been interpreted as violating the Cooperative Principle.

Readers' responses to use of these entity types illustrates, not that readers reward writers for responding to readers' needs, but how special to the situation of testing are the kinds of needs for which writers are being rewarded. That relations of power between writer and reader are so manifestly unequal is essential to any understanding of the dynamics at work in this situation. Because the situation requires readers to judge a text as evidence of both the quality of the writing and of the competence of the writer, but allows sufficient time for neither, writers <u>can</u> be evaluated as violating some criterion for establishing coherence no matter what form they put their message into. Writers who behave as "test-takers" can be judged as being unable to make a substantive argument. Writers who over-represent the facts can be judged as "name droppers." The very fact that the correlations, though quite significant, were only moderate reflects the risks writers take.

The claim that readers are evaluating the social identities constructed in the text needs to be further examined. The argument here has been that the salience of these entity types for readers

cannot adequately be explained in terms of their contribution to the communication of text content. One way to pursue this question would be to vary entity types systematically in a set of texts, similar to what was done by Hake and Williams. These same texts might be given to readers to elicit their comments, similar to what was done by Barrit, Stock, and Clark. If use of these entity types does create salient social identities for the writers, then readers' comments should reflect that fact. Further, the analysis here predicts that readers should evaluate texts in which certain social identities are constructed significantly differently from those in which linguistic form follows precisely from Gricean criteria.

Ever since Diederich (1974) reported that readers' beliefs about the personal and academic identities of students could influence, positively or negatively, readers' evaluations of their texts, holistic scoring procedures have presumed that anonymity could prevent such influence. It is for that reason that essays are randomized and students' names removed. Such strategies fail to ensure that readings are neutral, however. Despite attempts to decontextualize texts, it would seem that the social situation in which the reading takes place ineluctably recontextualizes them, forcing readers to construct the writers they will evaluate from the intersection of linguistic forms and the norms operating in the situation.

If it is true that readers use linguistic forms simultaneously to construct message and writer, and that their evaluation of the former is better understood as a response to the latter, further research should pursue relations among other

aspects of linguistic forms, social identity, and readers' evaluations. Neither this study nor any I know of in the evaluation of students' writing examines how linguistic markers of such social attributes as race, class, or gender influence readers' evaluations. Yet, such influences would go a long way toward explaining differences in the socio-economic make-up of remedial and non-remedial writing courses, especially since there is so little difference in the essay scores that assign the majority of students to one group or the other.

None of this is to say that differences in writing performance do not exist or that they are "merely" functions of one's social station. It is to say that the origins and foundations of inequality among writers (Hymes, 1973) are more far-reaching than current notions of writing abilty allow for. And if it is true that curricula are only as good as the tests that assess students' achievement, it is equally true that interpretation of those tests must be based on an adequate notion of what, in this time and place, it means to write.

Table One

Distribution of Unused-or-Inferable Entities, Containing Inferable Subjects, Brand-new, anchored Entities, and Situationally Evoked Subjects in Essay Sample

All Unused-or-Inferable Entities

Mean	3.7	Median	3.4
Std. Dev.	3.2	Range	16
Minimum	0	Maximum	16

Containing Inferable Subjects

Mean	3.5	Median	3.2
Std. Dev.	2.1	Range	10
Minimum	0	Maximum	10

All Brand-new, anchored Entities

Mean	4.2	Median	3.7
Std. Dev.	2.9	Range	18
Minimum	0	Maximum	18

Situationally Evoked Subjects

Mean	1.1	Median	1.0
Std. Dev.	.9	Range	3
Minimum	0	Maximum	3

Note. N = 99.

Appendix

Example One
Essay Relying on Brand-new, anchored Information
(Total Essay Score of 8)

Topic: Suppose that your school board has proposed to ban certain books from the high school library on the grounds that they contain foul language or explicit sex. Write an essay for your local newspaper that explains to the school board your position as a student on this issue. Be sure to include good reasons for your stand.

Banning books due to unethical content has become a rising issue in high school libraries (BNA;S). The high schools don't want anything to do with books that contain foul language and/or explicit sex (BNA;NS). Instead of banning such books, the schools could use these books as a way of teaching the students what is actually contained in the books and how to deal with it (BNA;S?). The students would read the books anyway, whether receiving them from school or somewhere else. Instead of having the students get the book from somewhere else and just reading the "trashy" parts, the schools could form some sort of program (BNA;NS). One idea could be a group discussion (BNA;NS). A few students could read the book & then discuss it with a teacher, a librarian, etc. Another program would be that if a student wanted to check the book out of a library he would have to get his parent's permission. The student would also have to write a book report following questions written up by the school (BNA;NS).

Sex, violence, and language have all become a big part in today's society (BNA;S?). Sex, especially has become more outspoken, it is displayed on T.V., in magazines, in the movies, and in books. Banning these books aren't going to shelter the students over the issues. In my opionion it's just an easy way out for the high schools (BNA;S), one less problem to deal with.

I can see the school's point on one hand, that by keeping these books the parents of students might get upset. Even some of the parents are ignorant. They won't let their child read a book from a school (BNA;NS), but they will let them go to the movies where sex is displayed on the screen in front of the child's eyes.

The whole issue of banning books should be brought up before the school board, but the issue should be to keep the books; devise programs to teach the students what is in them, what the author was saying, etc. The issue should be talked over with the parents. Maybe the parents could read the books with their children & discuss what sex is about & what is ethical & what isn't.

Books should not be banned from high school libraries. If a student wants to read a book that isn't up to "standards," (BNA;NS) then there should be some instructionilized guidance to go along with it (BNA;NS), otherwise, the student will get the book from somewhere else just to be rebelious & find out what it is that's so bad in the books.

Note: BNA= Brand-new, anchored; S= Specific, NS= Non-specific.

Example Two
Essay Relying on Unused-or-Inferable Information
(Total Score of 12)

The school board of Emmaus High School (UOI) has been considering a ban on certain books in its high school library . As a student of this school and a citizen of the free and democratic United States I must vehemently protest this action. If the school board votes to ban certain books because of lewd language or explicit sex what is to stop them or other institutions from banning books for political, social or religious reasons? Limited censorship can be a dangerous thing because it is a power that is very easily abused.

After the Russian Revolution of 1917 (UOI) one of the first things the new regime did was [to] ban books "offensive" to the government. Many of these books were not offensive because they contained explicit sex or foul language but because they conveyed ideas and principles that conflicted with those of the government. In many cases explicit sex and foul language were used as excuses for this censorship. In Nazi Germany (U) book burning (UOI) was common. Today (UOI) Russia and other Communist-block countries (U) actively censor and burn books. Giving anyone the power to censor books is unwise, there is always the danger of getting carried away and grasping too much power, as the activities of Russia and other such nations plainly show.

The censorship of books and repression of intellectual activity for whatever reasons are the first step toward a totalitarian regime. If school boards are given the right to censor books perhaps the government (UOI) will one day wish to ban books in schools and universities supported by federal funds. Once the wheel starts rolling it will be difficult to stop. The government might then wish to censor other aspects of citizens' lives.

Many works of fine literature contain foul language and explicit sex. Some of these works would be incomplete without them. Would one censor Sophocles's "Oedipus the King" (UOI) because it contains references to incest and also violence? Should Shakespeare (U) be banned because his "Othello" (UOI) portrays adultery? Some people might say yes. What is not offensive to one may be shocking to others.

Most high school students have been exposed to foul language and explicit sex from a very early age. The electronic media (U) is greatly responsible for this. I believe that a few explicit paragraphs in a book will do little to enlightend an already worldly child to the evil ways of the world. If people are afraid [that] children will be shocked or offended by certain books then they can put little markers on them saying that these materials might be offensive to some people. These little markers might even work to some advantage. A child who rarely reads might be enticed to read some fine literature.

I believe that the school board should not be given the power to exercise censorship. Censorship in any form is an evil thing that can have catastrophic consequences. Lord Acton (U) put it best when he stated, "All power corrupts, but absolute power corrupts absolutely." (UOI) We must not allow this to happen.

Note: UOI= Unused-or-Inferable; U= Unused.

Example Three

Topic: Imagine that Temple is considering a requirement that all students demonstrate the ability to do simple computer programming. Write to the dean of your college (Business, Liberal Arts, Social Administration, etc.) explaining why you think "computer literacy" should or should not be required of students at Temple.

Computer Literacy

To whom it may concern (SE),

I (SE) feel that computer programming should be a requirement for graduation. One reason for my decision is that in the years to come conputers will be household items. And everyone should know how to program one. Another reason for my decision is that the world is run by computers, almost every business no matter how small or large owns a computer or has access to one.

Since the business world depends so heavily on computers, when firms hire people for jobs, they are going to want someone qualified and I feel that one of the qualifications is going to be to know how to program a computer, or at least a working knowledge of a computer .

I feel that it is Temple's duty as a University to teach a well rounded education, and I feel that computer literacy would help to balance out that education. Most students probably don't realize the importance of computer literacy, but when they get out into the real world they will be glad that Temple required them to take a computer literacy course. At the time of the course the student probably said to himself why am I taking this course, it's a waste of time and money because I will never use this knowledge in the real world. But when they get out of school they know that it was not a waste of time. For my last point I would like to say that computers are the field of tomorrow, and that a knowledge of a computer at a young age will help especially if in the years to come you want to continue your education with computers. The little knowledge you gain in undergraduate school will help you through any other kind of computer schooling .

In a concluding statement I would just like to say that a knowledge in computers or a knowledge in any other subject cannot hurt it can only help. So if you feel that you cannot fulfill the requirement to take a computer literacy course then I feel that you should find another University or place of schooling .

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Footnotes

[1]I want to acknowledge Dr. Susan Wells, Dr. Leo Rigsby, and Dr. James Collins, who read earlier drafts of this paper, and from whose comments I have benefitted greatly. Dr. Linda Brodkey's influence will also be apparent in this paper. I also want to thank Dan Goodman, whose discussions with me of conflicts between evaluation theory and placement-testing practice have helped me to sharpen my arguments. Need I say that the flaws remain my own.

[2]Despite the fact that I had been involved, this situation provided a very naturalistic context in which to study the interpretation and evaluation of texts in the context of testing. Though I had trained the readers and though I did monitor their scoring to some extent, it could not be said that I controlled how they interpreted or applied criteria. Not only was I new in this position, but also the readers, graduate teaching assistants in English, felt that their training and experience made them at least as knowledgeable as I for doing what was, in their eyes, a very simple task. In discussions about applying criteria, then, my interpretation did not automatically carry the day; often, in fact, the group came to a consensus very different from the position I had advocated. And in fact, at the time I knew no more about testing as a "social" interaction than did the readers I worked with. Rather than considering my involvement an impediment to my study then, I consider my presence part of the situation to be examined.

[3]I do not mean to imply, however, that readers do so intentionally, or out of the same conscious "bad faith" Lakoff imputes to advertisers. Rather, the analysis here presumes that readers, as well as writers, are responding to the norms of the

situation. Readers have power to the extent that they can apply those norms to the texts they evaluate. But they do not control the norms themselves.

*The other two uses occur in unmarked instances of direct discourse in which the writer was attributing some statement to a hypothetical student